

POSSIBLE CHANGES TO REGULATIONS FOR COBIA

The department plans to list cobia as in need of conservation and develop cobia regulations in response to the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission Interstate Fishery Management Plan for the Atlantic Migratory Group of Cobia.

Discussion: Cobia (*Rachycentron canadum*) are caught in both state and federal waters along the Atlantic Coast and in the Chesapeake Bay. Cobia harvest has greatly exceeded its federal acceptable catch limit (ACL) over the past couple of years. As a result, changes in management are needed in order to protect against the potential negative impacts resulting from an unregulated fishery. The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission's South Atlantic Management Board finalized an Interstate Fishery Management Plan for the Atlantic Migratory Group of Cobia in October 2017 which will complement fishery management efforts of the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council. To comply with the plan, Maryland will need to implement regulations. To adopt regulations, the department will need to declare cobia as in need of conservation. Listing cobia as in need of conservation was discussed in 2016, but the department did not move forward because there was not enough information to guide regulations. The addition of cobia to the in need of conservation list provides the Secretary of Natural Resources authority to adopt rules and regulations relating to the taking, possession, transportation, sale or offer for sale, size limits, and other regulations necessary to conserve the fish when federal recommendations are made.

Maryland has very low commercial and recreational landings for cobia, although it is gaining interest in all sectors in Chesapeake Bay. Availability is sporadic as we are at the Northern end of the fish's range. Maryland has already been identified as a de minimus state which means that we will not be subject to all of the requirements of the plan (e.g. quota monitoring).

The management plan will require Maryland to adopt the following regulations.

Recreational Regulations:

The plan allows Maryland to choose between two options for the recreational fishery.

Option 1

Size: 29" minimum fork length

Possession limit: 1 fish per vessel per day

Season: open all year

Option 2 — Implement identical regulations as Virginia. Virginia will make a final determination on its 2018 regulations in February although no significant changes are anticipated. Regulation for 2018 will likely be:

Size: 40" minimum total length (equivalent to 36" minimum fork length)

Possession limit: 1 fish per person per day, maximum of 3 fish per vessel per day

Season: June 1 through September 15

Commercial Regulations:

Size: 33" minimum fork length

Possession limit: 2 fish per person per day with a maximum of 6 fish

Season: Fishery will be closed by public notice when Federal waters are closed by National Marine Fisheries Service because the 50,000 pound coast wide catch limit has been projected to be attained. In 2017, the fishery closed in September.